

Christian Missions a Divine, Not a Human, Enterprise



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CHRISTIAN MISSIONS A DIVINE, NOT A HUMAN, ENTERPRISE,

“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” (Luke xxiv. 45-49.)

THAT which originates with man is open to question, and subject to man's approval or rejection. No man, nor set of men, can claim absolute perfection or infallibility, who are not fanatics or fools.

Therefore, everything of human origin, however wise or good, must be subject to man's judgment or approval before it can bind his conscience. But that which originates with God is above question or criticism. From his wisdom and authority there is no appeal. Every true Christian must accept God's authority as supreme, and his wisdom as infinite. Nearly all opposition and indifference to Christian missions among real Christians grows out of the mistake that it is a *human* and not a *divine* enterprise. But how stupid and slow of heart not to see the revelations of God's purpose and plan to save a lost world, which are set forth in the Word of God so plainly and repeatedly that even a child might see it. Yet we see the very apostles themselves utterly blind to the great commission to “make disciples of all nations,” and God must perform a miracle, to open Peter's eyes, before he can see that “God is no respecter of persons;” and Peter must rehearse the whole history of the vision to Peter and Cornelius, and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on these Gentiles, before the others at Jerusalem could see that God had “granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life.” All this occurred after Jesus had “opened their eyes

that they might understand the Scriptures"—after he had said unto them: "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations."

The above is an illustration of the power of human prejudice to blind the mind and pervert the judgment of man, and ought to admonish every sincere and thoughtful person that we are in danger of allowing our opinions and prejudices to shut our eyes against the plainest and most important truths of God's Word.

What opposition and indifference did William Cary have to face, a century ago, when he tried to arouse the conscience of the Church to the duty of preaching the gospel in all the world! He was subjected to ridicule and mockery, and sneered at as the "Consecrated Cobbler."

It seemed that the mass of Christians were utterly blind to the duty of obeying the great command of our Saviour; and, although the last hundred years have been marked as the "Era of Modern Missions," during which God has wrought wonders as great as those recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, yet there are still otherwise intelligent people, who in most everything else, seem to be loyal to Christ, that are bold to tell you that they do not believe in "foreign missions." We here and now call upon all such, who acknowledge the Word of God as their guide, to face the majesty and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose solemn charge to his disciples is found in these words: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. xxviii. 18, 19.) Again: "And he said unto them, go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark xvi. 15.)

Before the supreme authority of God's Word let our opinions and prejudices bow in perfect submission. "When God speaks, let all the world keep silence." What is man that he should flaunt his opinions in the face of God's authority and ignore the revelations of his will?

He says "go." Where? "Into all the world." For what? "Preach the gospel to every creature." He endured the contradiction of sinners, the mocking and scourging of his enemies, the shame and cruel death of the cross, for what purpose? Let him answer—"that repentance and remis-

sion of sins should be preached in his name among all nations." (See text.)

There is no room for doubt or equivocation in these emphatic statements of the Word of God. Here is the divine method and plan to save the world, set forth by the Lord of Glory himself with the express command to "teach all nations," and to "preach the gospel to every creature." It is not a question of expediency—whether it is wise or best to preach the gospel among all nations—it is a question of loyalty or obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Before these positive statements of the Bible, every objection that man has ever offered falls to the ground.

Christian missions is not an expedient to provide for an unforeseen emergency—not an afterthought with God. In the councils of Deity, before the world was, Christ was the lamb to be slain, to atone for the sins of mankind.

Let us now consider what is involved in all opposition to Christian missions.

He that opposes this divine enterprise repudiates the Word of God and exalts his opinions above the authority of Christ. He sits in judgment on the wisdom and goodness of God, and censures the Divine government for having imposed upon the Church an unreasonable and unjust obligation to "preach the gospel among all nations." He ignores that inexpressible love, for which "it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead, . . . that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations." I make this charge, as awful as it is, against every Christian who arrays his objection to God's own enterprise for the salvation of all men. Who will deny this charge in the face of the Scriptures quoted?

Let me ask you, dear reader, can you be guilty of such contempt of God, and such ingratitude to him who died that you might live? Have you been honest enough to investigate the objections made to foreign missions, to see if they were grounded upon fact or falsehood, upon faith in God, or unbelief of his word? Will you patiently and candidly follow the writer into an investigation of the objections which are most frequently made to foreign missions?

The first is this: "Missions do not pay"—that is, the results do not jus-

tify the expenditure of money and labor for the evangelization of the world. Now, let me ask, who is competent to judge whether missions pay? "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." (Acts xv. 18.) Can the Almighty commit a blunder so fatal as to undertake an enterprise that is not worth what it costs? The very thought is a reflection on the wisdom of God. Shall we measure the value of souls by the niggardly offerings we make for this cause for which the Lord of Glory died? But the statement that "missions do not pay" is not true, even from a human point of view. If all the disciples of Christ had refused to leave Jerusalem until all the sinners of that city were converted, Christianity would have died in its cradle, and all the world would have been "without God and without hope." The apostles, no doubt, thought that Christianity was a failure when their Lord was crucified, and all forsook him and fled; but he who is the author of this "divine enterprise" knew the end from the beginning, and made the wrath of his enemies to work out his own decree. Paul and Silas did not think missions a failure when they were cruelly beaten and thrust into the inner prison, but sang praises to God and prayed until the foundation of the prison was shaken and an earnest of victory was given these prisoners of the cross.

What if the missionary must sometimes wait for years before he can see any fruit of his labor and sufferings? It is the Master's command that he is to obey. God will surely bring forth the harvest in his time. Take, for example, the missionaries to Tahiti. They had labored for sixteen years without any seeming success. Their houses were burned, they were driven from the island, and all communication with the natives was cut off. The directors at home were talking of abandoning the mission. Not so with these missionaries who gave themselves to prayer. Two household servants of the missionaries "had, unknown to them, received impressions which led them to pray to God, after the expulsion of the missionaries; so that when they returned to the island they found a few prepared of the Lord." Then followed such a series of successes as has never been heard of before nor since. One island after another received the gospel until group after group came under the transforming power of the gospel of Christ. "Since missionary work began in the South Seas . . . the converts, living and dead, in Western Polynesia, have numbered over a

million." One has said that in the South Sea Islands a circle might be drawn, whose diameter is four thousand miles, in which the gospel had been preached on almost, if not quite, every island, so completely has the gospel triumphed among those cannibals and savages of these islands of the Pacific.

The American Baptist Union planted their first mission in the Telugu country in 1835. For thirty years but little, if any, seeming success attended their labors. Time after time the executive committee at home considered whether they should abandon the mission. But a few faithful friends plead for its continuance. Mr. Jewett declared that he would go back, if only to die there, rather than abandon the work, though he had been compelled to return to this country because of his failing health. After thirty-two years of disappointed hope the walls of this Jerico of heathenism began to fall. One victory after another followed until, in 1877, ten thousand were baptized in one year, two thousand two hundred and twenty-two being baptized in one day; and the success of this mission has been a marvel of continued victory.

Thus we see how God vindicates the faithfulness of those who trust and obey his command to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

What if large sums of money must be expended in some heathen countries to establish the Church among those for whom Christ died, and who, for nearly nineteen centuries, have been deprived of their blood-bought right? "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein." Has he not a right to own? Does he not charge Israel with robbery because they did not bring the tithes into his house? Are we not wholly dependent on him for all we have, even the breath we breathe? But how little do we give for the salvation of the world, in comparison with what we spend for luxuries! One authority says we spend one hundred and fifty times as much on tobacco as we do for missions, and one hundred and eighty to two hundred times as much for strong drink as we do for missions. What have we to show for this enormous amount for whisky and tobacco? Yet those very people who tell us that missions do not pay are probably helping to spend more than a hundred times as much for tobacco than they do for the evangelization of the world. Ask the millions of redeemed souls,

who have been saved through the agency of Christian missions, if missions pay. Who will raise the question, "do missions pay?" when we meet him, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we might be rich.

Some will tell you that foreign missions are wrong because some of the missionaries have been put to death by those people to whom they were sent; and this is taken as proof that the whole business is wrong. Some have gone so far as to contend that the civil government should take steps to forcibly put a stop to what they regard as a foolish exposure of life and waste of money in sending men and women to those hostile nations. In this objection there is not the least regard for the Word of God. The wisdom and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ are utterly ignored. Did not the Master say, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me? For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it." Did not the very people for whom Christ died and to whom he came crucify him?

Tradition says that all the apostles except one suffered death as martyrs for the faith they preached. Thousands of the early Christians were put to death for the gospel's sake. Does all this prove that it was wrong to preach to the people of that time? What is man that he should presume to know better than his Creator about what is right or wrong; and despise the authority of the Lord of heaven and earth? Shall we call in question the veracity of Christ, who declares that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations?" (Matt. xxiv. 14.)

It has been charged by some that missionaries are responsible for the trouble that has existed in some foreign lands, such as the Boxer uprising in China. That missionaries come in for their share of the hatred that the Chinese bear toward all foreigners in their country will not be denied; nor will it be denied that the introduction of a religion that to some extent subverts their long-established customs and habits of domestic and religious life will arouse suspicion and prejudice toward all Christians. But to find the true cause of the uprisings in China against all foreigners in that country we need go no further than certain outrages against their rights that some nations, called "Christian nations," have committed against these people. How can they forget the awful outrage against their highest interest

committed against them by Christian England, when she forced the accursed "opium traffic" upon them at the cannon's mouth? How often have they been forced to grant concessions to these so-called Christian nations who, like vultures, have been hovering on their coasts, threatening to dismember their great kingdom, and appropriating the territory for extension of these foreign powers? Think of Christian England putting a premium upon lust in India! And Christian America "flooding Africa with rivers of rum," against the protest of the helpless natives! Look at that "pathetic document," the first letter written in English by a Congo native, who addressed the Archbishop of Canterbury in these words:

"Great and good chief of the tribe of Christ, greeting: The humblest of your servants kisses the hem of your garment, and begs you to send to his fellow servants more gospel and less rum."

"In the bonds of Christ,

"Ugalla."

In every mission field where our missionaries have suffered death there have been outrages against the natives, committed by dishonest and unprincipled traders who have robbed these people, and in some instances murdered them with fiendish delight. Twice has the Rev. John G. Paton come all the way from the New Hebrides to this country to plead with this Government to stop the importation of whisky and fire-arms to those islands because of the destruction caused by this traffic among the natives. Is it any wonder that these ignorant natives, who regard all foreigners as Christians, have been cruel in their treatment of the missionaries, especially when they are taught to hate the missionary as the cause of every calamity they suffer? Those who have robbed them by their infamous traffic, teach the natives to hate the missionary and the cause he represents.

One of the East India Company remarked that he had "rather see a shipload of devils land in India than a shipload of missionaries." It is the same spirit that inspired the silversmiths of Ephesus to raise a mob to drive the Christian missionary from their country, because their craft was in danger. (Acts xix. 24-41.)

Again—it is urged as an objection to foreign missions, that "we ought

not to interfere with the heathen because they have as much right to their religion as we have to ours." This objection not only ignores Divine authority and sets at naught the Word of God, but puts the work of missions in a false light. It is not the purpose of the Christian missionary to *compel* the heathen by force to abandon his religion and accept that of Christ. Some Roman Catholic countries have yoked civil and military power to the Church to force people to accept their hybrid phase of Christianity; but such a spirit is antagonistic to the gospel of Christ. The victories of the gospel are not won with "shot and shell," but by the ministries of truth and love. That old delusion that "it makes no difference what a man believes, if he is sincere," is at the bottom of this objection. Because the heathen world have believed falsehood they have been for centuries and millenniums under the curse of their debasing idolatries. Their social, moral, and religious condition, almost beggars description, and stands in awful contrast with those countries where the gospel of Christ has had its transforming power. Look at India, with its nearly three hundred millions of people, sunk in poverty so deep that a hungry man will pray for tigers because they do not devour their victims wholly, and he may, from what they leave, appease his hunger! And sunk in ignorance so low that a "human being will pray to a hole in a rock;" "where the cow is a sacred animal, entitled to divine honors, and woman is a wicked animal entitled to no respect!"

Another objection, and one in frequent use among those who oppose missions, is this: "We have the heathen at home, and ought to get them saved before we send the gospel to heathen abroad." This objection, which repudiates the authority of Christ, and exalts human opinion above the Word of God, is based on a false assumption. We have no heathen here, except in some of our large cities, like New York and San Francisco; and there are agencies at work for their conversion. Now and then we see a transient Chinese laundryman in the smaller cities, but those who urge the above objection to missions abroad are about the last ones to do anything for the salvation of these. The objector means that missions should not be undertaken abroad as long as any sinners remain unsaved at home. The logic of this objection would have confined the gospel to those incorrigible sinners at Jerusalem, who crucified the Lord of Glory, and shut their eyes against every revelation of divine truth and grace; and robbed the rest of

mankind of their right to the privileges of the gospel, and the blessings of the kingdom of Christ to the end of the ages. It would have left all of us Gentiles in the gloom of pagan darkness, with no hope in the world's Redeemer. As long as men are moral agents, with power to receive or reject the gospel, there will be those who will not repent and believe. God forbid that the stubbornness and unbelief of those who have heard the gospel and rejected it should shut the door of God's kingdom in the face of the countless millions for whom Christ died!

The Divine order is, "tarry at Jerusalem until endued with power from on high," after which they were to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The very life of the Church depends on its missionary spirit. That Church that arrays itself against missions is doomed. Where is there to be found one prosperous denomination of the Church of Christ that opposes missions? Take the history of the missionary and anti-missionary Baptist Churches for the last hundred years. One hundred years ago a small handful of Baptists were missionaries in spirit and practice. Now, that little handful has become the great missionary Baptist Church, which takes rank with the foremost denominations of the Church of Christ, while the anti-missionary Baptist Church is but a handful in comparison with the other.

Bishop Thoburn is quoted as saying that "God would sweep away the Church from the earth if missions were deliberately abandoned."

It is urged by some that the heathen can be saved without the gospel, and that we ought not to increase their responsibility by giving them more light. If that be so, why should we have the gospel anywhere? Let us see what the logic of this argument leads to. St. Jerome is quoted as saying that "when a boy, living in Gaul, he beheld the Scotts, a people of Britain, eating human flesh; and though there was plenty of cattle and sheep at their disposal, yet they would prefer a ham of the herdsman, or a slice of the female breast, as a luxury." From the inhabitants of Britain have come forth the most intelligent and highly civilized people on earth. Was it an injustice to these people to preach the gospel to them, by which they have been lifted from the condition of savage cannibals to that of intelligent, moral, and refined men and women? If this objection is valid, it impeaches the wisdom and goodness of God. It charges him with the injustice of im-

posing upon men a condition which was not only not necessary to their salvation, but increased the danger of their eternal damnation.

To say that the heathen can be saved without the gospel is pure assumption. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?"

"Thus it is written and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations." If "it behooved Christ to suffer, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations," then it is supremely important that the Church of Christ obey the great commission of her Lord. The question with us is not "can the heathen be saved without the gospel," but rather this, "can we be saved if we refuse to send it to them."

When the Duke of Wellington was asked if he believed in foreign missions, he replied: "Obey your marching orders."

For a Christian to oppose this "divine enterprise," is treason to the Lord Jesus Christ. We may despise God's authority, and ignore his wisdom by repudiating the only method he has ordained for the salvation of the world; but let us not forget that he who said "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness," is able to make good his own word. And those who sit in judgment on God's ways, and impeach his wisdom and goodness by opposing their objections to his own enterprise, find themselves at war with God.

When a Russian official said to Dr. Schauffler, "my imperial master, the Czar will never allow Protestantism to set foot in Turkey," the Doctor calmly replied: "My imperial master, Christ, will never ask the Emperor of Russia where he may set his foot or plant his kingdom."

In 1851, when the Sultan, Mahmud, in Turkey, ordered the expulsion of all missionaries, Cyrus Hamlin said to William Gooddell: "We have got to leave; the Sultan has issued an edict, and the British Ambassador and the American Consul say it is no use to resist." But Gooddell replied: "Hamlin, the Sultan of the universe can change all this." They gave themselves

to prayer, and the next day the Sultan, Mahmud, died, and the cruel edict has never been enforced.

When Napoleon proposed his conquering career in Russia, the Russian Ambassador said to him: "Sir, remember that man proposes but God disposes!" Napoleon, in his arrogance, answered: "I want your master to understand that I am he that proposes, and I am he that disposes." But when this defiant Napoleon retreated from Moscow, he left 213,516 soldiers of his proud army dead corpses, and had but 25,000 left.

"The heathen may rage, and the people imagine vain things," but "Christ shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession;" and every objection that men or devils make to his divine enterprise will he "dash in pieces as a potter's vessel."

Jesus shall reign wher'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.